

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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CATFISH UNLEASHED

By Joe Wilkinson
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Working the wood, wire and foam cage up the ramp, Chris Mack tipped it forward. As he popped the clasp, the door fell open. Inside, a dark, writhing mess of whiskers, spines and fins splashed in the six inches of water that remained. Catfish heaven to many anglers.

These channel cats were a little small for the frying pan. Most were eight to 10 inches long; maybe three or four to a pound. Going into the cages three months ago, though, they were 3-inch fingerlings, running 25 to 45 to a pound. Now, they are fending for themselves in 34 lakes across Iowa.

The cages kept largemouth bass and other predators from making meals of the little catfish, in county conservation park lakes. They also kept the fingerlings close at hand for daily feeding. Hatchery formula pellets spelled quick growth, with little effort by the cats. Still, it wasn't completely fair. The occasional 12-inch catfish looked almost ready for the stringer, obviously from shoving the little ones out of the way at the underwater feeding trough. The number of catfish depends on the size of the lake, fishing pressure, and survival of the fingerlings through the summer. At Kent Park Lake near Tiffin, for example, just a shade fewer than 4,000 catfish were released late this summer.

In its fourth decade now, the caged catfish program of the Department of Natural Resources gets one of Iowa's favorite fish closer to the anglers that pursue it. "I'll usually keep them at 18 to 21 inches," says angler Greg Van Tomme of Brooklyn, as he

watched workers open the cages at Rodgers Lake in Benton County late this summer. “It’s a good idea. It keeps people coming out. It keeps fish in the lake. Usually in the fall, they start biting really well on liver, stink bait.”

The DNR spawns catfish at its Rathbun hatchery each summer. By the next spring, they are three inches long and ready for a new home. “By distributing them to the county lakes, we get better growth,” explains DNR supervisor of hatcheries Mike Mason. “The small lakes have higher water temperatures than Rathbun. The longer growing season and having counties feed them, they get to a large size sooner.” The program also frees up limited hatchery space. “We are ‘pond poor’ for raising small fish, compared to surrounding states,” says Mason. “It saves us space and money.”

There is virtually no catfish reproduction in most Iowa lakes. Stocking is required to keep cats in the water. It also keeps things busy in those state and county lakes. “In the summer, we have quite a few bank fishermen. Last weekend, too, we had 12 or 13 boats on the (26 acre) lake,” recalls seasonal worker Larry Steffen from Hannen Lake, also in Benton County. “Most of what I see is catfish. Some four and five pounders (are common). They were put in, probably, four or five years ago.”

Each day, Steffen pours a couple cans of pellets into the floating cages. “There are usually a few big ones outside the cages, looking for a handout, too,” he laughs. At three inches, the caged catfish would be sitting ducks, *outside* the cages. “Most would be eaten by largemouth bass in here,” notes Mack, as he looks over Hannen Lake. “By growing them to nine, ten inches they can go into the lake safe from most predators. By next year, the little cats we released will be 12 to 14 inches.”

Participation in the state to county distribution fluctuates. Two counties dropped the free catfish this year; one for budget reasons, one because the lake was being drawn down for renovation. Overall, though, anglers are the ones getting the boost. There are more, and larger, catfish in the lakes for them to catch; more choices for fishing. Van Tomme might fish Diamond Lake in Iowa County one time, Rodgers Lake in Benton County the next.

Judging by the half dozen boats trolling the water of Kent Park in Johnson County, or the twenty camping units perched on the hillside above Hannen Lake on a weekday, access isn’t a problem. The challenge is keeping the lakes stocked with catfish for eager anglers.

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MARINAS MAY APPLY FOR GRANT TO PROVIDE FACILITIES FOR LARGER BOATS

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will receive a \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to improve boating access, strengthen community

ties to the water and promote the awareness of transient boating opportunities. This grant is made available through the Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) program.

Transient boats are boats that are 26 feet long or longer. Facilities to accommodate these larger boats are often insufficient and sometimes lacking totally. Transient boaters are unable to enjoy many of the recreational, cultural, historical, scenic and natural resources opportunities associated with waters they boat, said Martin Konrad, who coordinates the BIG program for the DNR.

The grant is being offered to public marinas that have a need to create or improve transient boat facilities. Marinas along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers are the most likely recipients for the program money, Konrad said.

“These rivers lack the marinas or commercial tie-up facilities along extended stretches that benefit transient boats,” Konrad said. “Basic facilities such as tie-ups, fueling docks, utilities and restrooms are mostly non-existent.”

Marina owners and operators interested in the program should contact Martin Konrad at 515/281-6976. Interested parties must submit grant proposals to the DNR by October 15, 2004.

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TWO SPECIAL DEER SEASONS BEGIN SEPT. 18

DES MOINES – The special youth and severely disabled hunter deer hunting seasons begin Saturday, Sept. 18, and run through Oct. 3.

The special youth season is open to Iowa residents only ages 12 through 15. Youth hunters must have reached their 12th birthday, but not have reached their 16th birthday on the day they buy the license. The deer license costs \$26. Youth licenses will be valid statewide for taking any deer with a bow, shotgun or muzzleloader.

The youth must provide proof of successfully completing an approved hunter safety course and must hunt under the direct supervision of an adult. The adult must have a valid hunting license and pay the habitat fee, if they are normally required to do so to hunt. There can only be one youth for each properly licensed adult.

The youth and accompanying adult must comply with the blaze orange clothing requirements and all other deer hunting regulations apply.

Persons classified as severely disabled may hunt during the disabled hunter season by obtaining a special license. Applications for these licenses are available at the Iowa DNR central office in Des Moines, or at one of the eight district offices across the

state. Information on district offices is available at www.iowadnr.com or by calling 515-281-5918.

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IOWA FISHING REPORT

For the week of September 14, 2004

www.iowadnr.com

The Iowa Fishing Report is issued every other week into the fall. For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: The Mississippi River at Guttenberg is 76 degrees and water clarity is good. Water levels are low and steady. Good fishing continues on **Pools 9 to 11** with white bass, bluegill, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleye, and sauger all being caught in good numbers. White bass are schooling up and action can be very fast with fish up to 15 inches being reported. Watch for schools feeding on minnows. Look for areas where minnows are continuously being chased and try to maintain some distance away to avoid spooking the white bass. Any lure that will flash, such as a spoon or a spinner, will work. Make long casts into the areas where the minnows have been breaking the water. Bluegill fishing continues to be quite good in **Pools 9 to 11** with many fish being taken out of brush piles in moderate flowing sloughs. Areas such as Minnesota Slough near New Albin, Harpers Slough near Harpers Ferry, Johnson and Wyalusing Slough near McGregor, and Cassville Slough near Guttenberg have produced good fishing. Tailwater areas near rock riprap have also been good for bluegill fishing. A simple rig with a night crawler and a small split shot works best. Walleye and sauger action is also quite good at times on the Mississippi River. Some fish are being taken in the tailwaters of **Locks and Dams 9 and 10**. Most tailwater anglers are using a jig tipped with a minnow. Other places to try for walleye and sauger are large flowing sloughs such as Minnesota Slough near New Albin or Harpers Slough near Harpers Ferry. Anglers fishing these areas are using a 'Lindy' type rig with a night crawler. Largemouth bass fishing has been excellent in **Pools 9 to 11**. These fish are being caught on a variety of lures, but the traditional tube jig and spinner baits are working best. Largemouth are generally found in backwater lakes on the Mississippi, however, with the low water levels, these fish are moving out into current areas. Look for largemouth to hang out near the openings of large backwater complexes or in adjacent flowing sloughs. Some are even being caught on rock wing dams. Big Slough and DeSoto Bay near Lansing have been hot in **Pool 9**. In **Pool 10**, McGregor Lake and the lakes near Wyalusing Slough have been excellent and Cassville Slough has produced well in recent weeks. Smallmouth bass fishing is also excellent in **Pools 9 to 11**. Smallmouth bass are found in swift current areas with rock. These areas are generally

associated with main channel rocky habitats, which include bank stabilization rock, day markers or wing dams. Spinners and crankbaits are the lures of choice for this feisty fish. Using top-water lures, such as floating crankbaits or even bug imitation lures can also be effective. Many fish are in the sub-legal 10 to 13-inch range, but are still fun to catch. The size limit on large and smallmouth bass in the Mississippi River is 14 inches.

Water level on the **Mississippi River** at Bellevue is at 4.93 feet and on a slight rise with a temperature of 74 degrees. Channel catfish are fair to good in **Pools 12 to 15**. Fish for channel catfish in the main channel near the tips of the wing dams in the faster currents using stink baits or night crawlers. Freshwater drum fishing is good on night crawlers. Drum are being caught in backwater areas, side channels and the main channel border along the wing dams in **Pools 12 to 15**. Bluegill fishing is fair to good in a wide variety of locations in **Pools 12 to 15**. Bluegill are being caught off the wing dams in the main channel border, side sloughs and in the backwater sloughs with little or no current. A piece of night crawler fished either under a bobber or along the bottom can produce some nice fish. Walleye fishing is fair to good on crankbaits, stick baits or live offerings fished along the face of the wing dams in **Pools 12 to 15**. Largemouth bass are fair to good using crankbaits, top-water lures, live rigs, and jigs tipped with a worm fished around woody structure, vegetation and off of rocks in a variety of areas in **Pools 12 to 15**. Crappie fishing is fair in **Pools 12 to 15** with a few being taken in areas with little or no current in the main channel border or backwater areas. Fish a minnow or jig in 2 to 7 feet of water for crappies. As always, if you're fishing in the Mississippi River and don't get a bite within 10 to 15 minutes, move to find feeding fish.

Anglers fishing the **Cedar** (Bremer and Black Hawk), **West Fork Cedar** (Black Hawk), **Shell Rock** (Butler) and **Wapsipinicon rivers** (Buchanan) are experiencing good fishing for walleye and smallmouth bass. Try drift fishing a night crawler through rocky areas or cast a crawdad-colored crankbait toward woody structure. Channel catfish are good on the **Cedar River** near Waverly. Use a leech or night crawler fished off the bottom in the riffle areas.

Maquoketa River (Delaware): The 4.5 mile catch-and-release area on the Maquoketa River below the Lake Delhi Dam is good for smallmouth bass on jigs or crawdad-colored crankbaits.

Lake Hendricks (Howard): Bluegill fishing is good using wax worms next to structure. Channel catfish are hitting crawlers fished along the bottom.

Trout fishing is excellent and streams are clear and fishable. September means that the three northeast Iowa trout hatcheries are back to the expanded stream stocking schedule. Streams such as Dalton Lake, Otter, Patterson, Silver, Swiss Valley and others are being stocked weekly with catchable-size trout. September is a beautiful time of the year on Iowa's trout streams. The weather is perfect and you'll find less competition for your favorite fishing holes. For current trout stocking information on northeast Iowa trout streams, call the trout stocking hotline at 563-927-5736. You can also access the proposed trout stocking calendar through the Internet at www.iowadnr.com and go to the fish and fishing web pages.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.

Northwest

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): Walleye fishing continues to improve. Anglers are trolling crankbaits on the north end. Quite a few 20 to 23-inch fish are being caught, along with many fish shorter than 14 inches. Drifting live bait from Cottonwood to Big Stoney points has also produced legal size fish. Smallmouth and largemouth bass fishing continues to be good. Anglers are catching smallmouth off the rock piles using plastics. Largemouth are being caught along the weed lines using jerkbaits and spinner baits. Yellow perch fishing has picked up off Jackson Point and in 17 to 20 feet of water in front of the old footbridge. Muskie anglers are starting to see some action and fishing should only continue to improve.

West Okoboji (Dickinson): Anglers are catching yellow perch and bluegills in 16 to 20 feet of water using small jigs tipped with wax worms or wigglers. Muskie anglers are starting to see better fishing and the action should only improve.

Willow Creek (Osceola): Anglers are catching bass near vegetation using jerkbaits and plastic worms. Bluegills and pumpkinseeds can be caught using a small piece of night crawler or grasshopper anywhere on the lake.

Black Hawk Lake (Sac): Channel catfish fishing is good all over the lake on a variety of baits. Anglers are catching a lot of yellow bass on the windy shoreline using jigs tipped with a piece of night crawler or cut bait. Crappie fishing is fair jigging along the docks. Anglers can expect a few bluegills as a bonus. Crappies are also being caught on Ice House Point among the trees.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): Fishing is good for channel catfish on stink bait or liver. Walleye fishing is fair off the rock piles using night crawlers and a slip bobber.

Yellow Smoke (Crawford): Anglers are catching a few bluegills and white bass.

Nelson Park (Crawford): Fishing is good for channel catfish on stink bait and liver.

North Twin (Calhoun): Bluegill fishing is fair. Anglers are catching a few walleyes.

Brushy Creek (Webster): The bridge on P-73 just south of Hwy. 20 is open. Fishing at the north end of the lake is picking up. Bass are located around the rocky shoreline. Bluegills continue to be caught on wax worms or a small piece of worm. A few walleyes have been caught on leeches.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Walleye fishing is fair trolling crankbaits and live bait in 8 to 12 feet of water. The Baptist Camp and Berkley fish habitat areas are producing the best. Remember the 14-inch minimum length limit. Yellow bass fishing has been spotty, with some reports of 10 to 20 fish being caught near the Baptist Camp and the Lone Tree Point area. Channel catfish are biting on chicken liver and dead chubs. Bullheads are hitting on night crawlers fished near the bottom.

Beeds Lake (Franklin): Crappie fishing is good. The fish are suspended in the main basin. Drift or troll small jigs to locate fish. From shore, the best place to fish is from the end of the fishing jetties. Crappies are in the 7 to 9-inch range.

Little Wall Lake (Hamilton): Channel catfish fishing is good using chicken liver and stink bait.

Boone River (Hamilton): Channel catfish fishing is excellent in the deeper holes using stink bait and night crawlers.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

Southwest

Viking (Montgomery): Crappie and bluegill fishing is fair using jigs tipped with night crawler or minnow in 6 to 8 feet of water. Channel catfish fishing is good using liver. Largemouth bass fishing has picked up in the evening around structure.

Cold Springs (Cass): Fishing is fair for crappies around the brush piles. Channel catfish fishing is good.

Manawa (Pottawattamie): Fishing is excellent for channel catfish on Boy Scout Island. Walleyes are being caught on the west shore along the rocks.

Orient (Adair): Channel catfish fishing is fair in the evening using liver.

Greenfield (Adair): Channel catfish are good toward evening.

Mormon Trail (Adair): Walleye fishing is good using crankbaits or jigs. The 7 to 9-inch crappies can be caught using minnows in 6 to 8 feet of water. Bluegills are being caught drifting a piece of night crawler 5 to 7 feet deep in front of dam. Fishing is good for largemouth bass. Channel catfish are good using night crawlers or liver.

Meadow (Adair): Bluegill fishing is fair on jigs and night crawlers. Largemouth bass fishing is good.

Prairie Rose (Shelby): Fishing is fair for 7-inch crappies in 6 to 8 feet of water using jigs and minnows around rocks and woody structure. Bass fishing is good. Anglers are catching channel catfish on liver.

Littlefield Lake (Audubon): Fishing is fair for large bluegills drifting with night crawlers. Channel catfish fishing is good.

Willow (Harrison): Largemouth Bass fishing is fair in the evenings around structure. Bluegills are good along weed edges. Channel catfish are being caught in the evenings using chicken liver.

Southwest Iowa Farm Ponds: Channel catfish, bluegill and largemouth bass fishing is fair. Remember to ask permission and clean up after yourself.

Big Creek (Polk): Channel catfish fishing has been good using night crawlers and cut and stink baits, with the best fishing at night or early morning. Bluegill fishing has slow to fair, although fish 8 inches or larger are common. A few crappies are being caught in deeper water and an occasional nice walleye has been reported caught on trolling crankbaits.

Lake Ahquabi (Warren): Channel catfish fishing is good with cut and stink baits. Bluegill and redear sunfish fishing has been slow using jigs or hook/bobber combination with worms and wax worms.

Hooper Lake (Warren): Bluegill fishing has been fair using worms and jigs. Largemouth bass fishing has been slow using buzzbaits and surface lures.

Hickory Grove (Story): Channel catfish fishing has been fair on night crawlers. Crappie fishing has been fair in deeper water, although fishing is spotty.

Don Williams (Boone): Crappie and bluegill fishing has been slow, with minnows and jigs the best for crappie, and small jigs with worms for bluegill. Channel catfish has been good using night crawlers and chicken liver. Largemouth bass fishing has been slow, with the best fishing with surface plugs and crankbaits.

Rock Creek Lake (Jasper): Channel catfish fishing has been good along the shorelines and shallow water. Crappie fishing has been getting better for those fishing in deeper water. Largemouth bass fishing is also slow, although a few nice fish have been reported.

Easter Lake (Polk): Channel catfish fishing has been good with most caught on night crawlers and stink baits. Crappie and bluegill fishing has slowed, but some anglers are doing well. An occasional walleye is being caught.

Red Rock (Marion): White bass fishing has been excellent using crankbaits, sonars and a variety of casting lures. Channel catfish fishing has been fair in the bays and coves.

Red Rock tailwater (Marion): Channel catfish fishing has been good using traditional baits, and a few nice walleye have been caught. White bass fishing has been good in the tailwater using jigs and minnows. Crappies in the 10 to 14-inch range are starting to show up in good numbers.

Roberts Creek (Marion): Crappie fishing has been fair to good using jigs with minnows and/or night crawlers. Channel catfish have been hitting on night crawlers.

Saylorville Lake (Polk): White bass fishing has been good for boat anglers by trolling crankbaits and for shore anglers by casting small spoons. Anglers were catching fish up to 3 to 4 pounds. A few wipers were mixed in the catch. Channel catfish fishing has been good using traditional baits near the spillway outlet from Big Creek Lake.

Saylorville Lake tailwater/river (Polk): White bass and channel catfish fishing has been good below Saylorville Reservoir. Flathead catfish fishing is fair with some nice fish caught. A few crappie and walleye have also been reported.

Three Mile (Union): Channel catfish are being caught with liver. Some crappies are being caught using minnows in 8 to 14 feet of water. Largemouth bass and walleye can be caught on crankbaits and jigs in deeper water. Anglers are starting to catch muskies.

Twelve Mile (Union): Fishing for channel catfish is good using night crawlers or liver.

Icaria (Adams): Fishing is good for catfish using liver. The lake is currently being lowered for a fishery renovation and placement of shoreline riprap. Boat ramp usage will be questionable during the fall.

Green Valley (Union): Channel catfish can be caught in the bays using liver and night crawlers. Some crappie can be caught using minnows around the deeper structure.

Little River (Decatur): Catfish can be caught in the open bays using liver or night crawlers. Crappies are being caught in the flooded trees and deeper bays. Some walleyes are being taken with crankbaits.

Slip Bluff (Decatur): Some crappies are being caught off the deeper trees piles and flooded timber.

West Lake Osceola (Clarke): Largemouth bass are biting on crankbaits and jigs. Channel catfish fishing is good using liver.

Fogle Lake (Ringgold): Channel catfish can be caught in the rocks or shallow bays. The lake is currently being lowered to improve fish growth but is still accessible for fishing.

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19: Fishing on the Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19 has been good. The water temperature at Lock and Dam 16 (Muscatine) is 75 degrees and the water levels are expected to remain stable over the next several days. Fishing for channel catfish has been good on various baits around the wing dams and off the main channel. Bluegill fishing has been fair. Anglers report that crappie fishing has been good with some sorting for sizeable fish. Look for crappie and bluegills in the deeper backwater areas and around the wing dams. Walleye and sauger fishing has been slow, but anglers are picking up a few fish around the wing dams.

Lake Odessa (Louisa): The water level is down for the rest of the summer. Access to some of the remote ponds is now very limited. Fishing is still slow but should pick up between the two duck seasons as the water cools and the fish start their migration to the deeper water and feed heavily on the young of the year fish.

Lake Darling (Washington): The larger crappies and bass are still spending most of their time out around the deeper habitat but the flatheads seem to have moved into the shallow water last week to feed on the small bluegills and green sunfish.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): Anglers are picking up a few bluegills in the deeper water trees. Looks like there was a nice crappie spawn this year so look for crappie fishing to pick up in the next couple of years.

Lake Geode (Henry): Anglers are catching some nice catfish. Look for the bluegills and bass to be on the outer edge of the weed beds.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Crappies have been hitting in deeper water on small crankbaits trolled over rock reefs and other underwater structure.

Lake Miami (Monroe): Channel catfish have been hitting on liver. Largemouth bass have been hitting on artificial lures fished around the standing timber.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Bluegills have been hitting around the edges of the lily pads. Channel catfish have been hitting on stink bait and chicken liver. Largemouth bass have been biting on artificial lures and spinner baits.

Lake Keomah (Mahaska): Channel catfish have been hitting on stink bait and largemouth bass have been biting on artificial lures and spinner baits.

Diamond Lake (Poweshiek): Crappie fishing is starting to pick up. Fish small jigs around the brush piles and trees.

Iowa River (Washington and Louisa): Water levels are a little higher than normal for this time of year but look for some trouble getting around some of the sand bars in the lower section of the river around Wapello. Catfishing has been fair on minnows and night crawlers.

Skunk River (Washington): The river is finally getting low enough to cause boaters some problems going over the riffles.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

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